

Michaud Announces New VA Program to Help Northern Maine Veterans

Thursday, September 30 2010

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud, Chairman of the Veterans Health Subcommittee, announced that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will soon implement a pilot program to provide health care services through a contractual arrangement with a non-VA provider in Aroostook County. Michaud included this pilot program in a bill he worked to pass in 2008 called the “Veterans’ Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act.” A full description from the VA of the new program, which is being called Project ARCH (Access Received Closer to Home), can be found below.

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“Togus and Boston are so far away for our veterans in northern Maine. That’s why it is so important to move forward with this new program to provide care closer to home. It’s taken a while to get going, but I’m pleased that the VA is implementing it,” said Michaud, who has consistently pushed the VA to implement this program since it was passed into law in October of 2008.

In the coming days the VA will set up a website for local veterans to access additional program information. According to the VA, the facility that the VA will contract with in Aroostook County will be decided in the coming months, with the program coming fully online in mid-2011.

“Nationally, the idea with this pilot is to increase access to health care to more rural veterans with the hopes that we can expand it in the future,” said Michaud. “A chief complaint I get from veterans, especially in rural Maine, is the time it takes them to get to a VA facility. While improvements have been made through the opening of clinics, health care access points and mobile clinics, this new program will help increase access even further.”

Project ARCH (Access Received Closer to Home)

Summary:

- This pilot program, which VA is referring to as Project ARCH (Access Received Closer to Home), intends to improve access for eligible veterans by connecting them to health care services closer to their home.
- According to the law enacting this pilot program, there are specific criteria for locations where Project ARCH will occur. As such, there will be one pilot site located within Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) 1 (which includes Maine), 6, 15, 18 and 19. In addition, there are specific eligibility criteria for veterans to participate in the program.
- Once VA identified the VISNs that met the statutory criteria, a request for proposal was distributed to these VISNs. These proposals were evaluated by a team of subject matter experts. This team then recommended specific locations for approval by senior VA leadership.
- Project ARCH will occur in one site within VISN 1, specifically in Northern Maine.

Eligibility:

According to the law enacting Project ARCH, veterans are eligible to participate in the program if they reside in a location where a pilot site is located and are enrolled* for VA health care when the program starts and meet any of the following criteria:

- Live more than 60 minutes drive time from the nearest VA health care facility providing primary care services, or
- Live more than 120 minutes drive time from the nearest VA health care facility providing acute hospital care, or
- Live more than 240 minutes drive time from the nearest VA health care facility providing tertiary care

* Please note, regarding veterans who are eligible to enroll, this includes Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans and veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998, do not need to be enrolled for VA health care when Project ARCH starts, but will need to meet the abovementioned drive time criteria and enroll in VA in order to participate in the program.

The objectives for Project ARCH are to:

- Conduct a thorough evaluation on the effectiveness of the pilot programs, including the pilot program's cost, volume, quality of care, patient satisfaction, access to care, and benefits to veterans;
- Identify the strengths and challenges associated with implementing the pilot programs;
- Provide recommendations regarding the continuation of the pilot programs, expansion to other or all VISNs, discontinuation, or making the program permanent; and
- Submit annual reports to Congress on the status of the pilot programs for each year in which the pilot is conducted.

Additional Background:

- Now that the site has been identified, VA will begin the acquisition process to contract with qualified providers in Northern Maine to serve eligible Veterans.
- VA expects services to be available through Project ARCH by mid-2011.

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